

To the Members of the Hearing Committee:

I, along with my wife Hilary, felt compelled to write to you concerning Senator Looney's and others' proposed school regionalization bills, SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874, all of which have the same basic aim, to require smaller cities and towns in Connecticut to regionalize their school districts, in one form or another.

We oppose this legislation in any form and any attempt of this nature, whether by a statutory mandate, or by imposition of fines or other financial penalties on those towns that do not comply with regionalization. We urge you to similarly oppose any such measure.

Families like ours, those who came to Connecticut as adult professionals, and chose to raise our families here, did so almost universally, in reliance on the promise of a high quality, local education. Part of ensuring that experience for our children is the ability to speak with their educators, and voice concerns directly, to principals and administrators in a local, neighborhood setting.

We specifically chose to live in Ridgefield, as a result of the small schools, excellent reputation they had in providing high quality education, with the flexibility and adaptiveness in curricula that we desired, to provide our children with an education that best matched their abilities as they grew.

Now, with one child in kindergarten and one set to begin public schooling in the fall of 2020, the regionalization proposal is set to, under the guise of saving on administrative costs, eliminate one very substantial factor our family relied upon in choosing where to live and raise our children.

It is our opinion that the result of this proposal is far too unpredictable to support. Creation of a regional school may eliminate the close contact that we now enjoy with the school. It may result in our children, rather than attending elementary school within a mile of our home, traveling unknown times and distances to the regional schools that are created as a result of this proposal. It may result in the reduction or elimination of those programs, classes, or after school activities that Ridgefield public schools offer which we want to be available to our children as they grow. It may result in their inability to take part in those after school activities, as a result of greatly increased travel time.

It may result in highly standardized, factory like schooling, to meet the requirements of state government's benchmarks of success, rather than the uniquely tailored experience that now exists in Ridgefield and many other towns. It may result in greater centralization and consolidation of educational decision-making authority, resulting in elimination of teacher autonomy, in favor of "cost cutting" one size fits all approaches to statewide education. That we do not know and cannot be reasonably assured about the outcome speaks volumes.

The stated purpose of the proposal is to save money on administration. Schools already have incentive to keep administration as lean and efficient as possible, as the parent/tax payers who fund those schools see where their dollars go, in a direct manner. Once funds are comingled

it becomes harder to know where they go, and bureaucracy develops around the new regionalization authority. Governor Lamont's bill states that the committee created to oversee regionalization will be disbanded – ignoring the reality of changing demographics, and the future need to adjust regionalization based on population changes or other factors. To repeat, the uncertainty surrounding this whole potential plan is troubling.

We submit that regionalizing will have two effects: (1) mask the poorer outcomes of the school districts in Connecticut's larger cities by mixing in the better testing and other academic "success" barometer results from the smaller towns, to the detriment of the students of those larger schools, as this false inflation hides legitimate issues of the lack of achievement that schools promise. This is a paper cover up, a sham attempt to make it appear that Connecticut is better serving its more vulnerable population groups, that are in need of help; and (2) intentionally or not, force funds from the wealthier, smaller towns, into the larger cities, on the theory that the extra dollars will equate to better educational outcomes for the students in the larger, underperforming school districts.

A closer look at the bills in question shows that one portion of this statutory scheme is the consolidation of the collective bargain units. If this is the cost cutting aim, then a statutory measure far short of regionalization would achieve that goal.

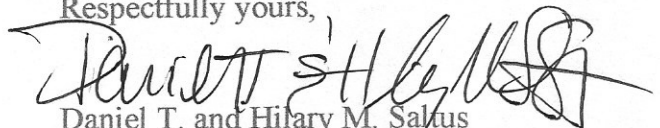
The same closer look indicates that the authority created will also have authority to approve new construction, or alterations to existing buildings, again, with an eye toward cost cutting, which necessarily means the same "one size fits all" solutions will potentially be applied to school buildings, as well as curricula.

Any attempt to justify this same requirement by use of a tax as opposed to a statutory mandate is a distinction without a difference, a mere legal fiction created to enforce a governmental dictate, in the same way and under the same penal authority of the State of Connecticut.

In conclusion, the benefits sought by this bill even if monetarily substantial, will be far outweighed by the negative impact on Connecticut's students, in all school districts.

Thank you very much.

Respectfully yours,


Daniel T. and Hilary M. Saltus
Ridgefield, Connecticut